

On Dreaming

On the 400th Anniversary of the death of Shakespeare

When I was 15 years old (in 1977) my school took us to the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford to see "As You Like It" starring Kate Nelligan. She was strong, sexy, exuberant, intelligent - and I wanted to be part of that world.

My school was a state school - where dreams were taken seriously. And 2 years later this school gave me 400 pounds to spend the summer in London as a young actor in the National Youth Theatre - performing in Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice".

Before going to drama school I sat A levels (from 16 to 18 years old) and read "King Lear" a thousand times.

At drama school I read and acted in Ibsen, Chekhov, Brecht - all accompanied by Shakespeare.

And since then I have directed some of his plays, taught others, learnt from them as a playwright and director, been fascinated by how his plays interacted with audiences, with politics, with statecraft, and the heart and desire, and confusion and mortality and loyalty - but most of all how they endlessly surprise by leading you to where you did not know you wanted to go. It has been a 38 year continual conversation.

I hope state schools still take the dreams of their pupils seriously - every single child, every single dream. Dreams before curricula every time.

I hope that Shakespeare is never forced towards a child or teenager but allowed to seduce the mind and body and heart - or allowed to pass on by without judgement.

I hope a child is never forced to take a test or exam about Shakespeare. That would be a small crime. And we all know...schools and teachers would never participate in small crimes against the soul.

"Cuanto menos se lee, más daño hace lo que se lee." Miguel de Unamuno.

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